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Inmates, staff unite in helping recovery

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Pontiac, Ill.--Staff and inmates alike at Pontiac Correctional Center are working together to aid those affected by the tornadoes that occurred a little more than a week ago, both by helping their own and going out and helping others.

More than 535 man-hours have been worked by a total of 61 inmates from PCC, as well as Decatur Correctional Center and Dixon Springs to help clean up the communities of Gifford and Brookport. Specifically, a five-man work crew from the medium security unit at PCC spent five days in Gifford.

William Troyer, administrative assistant to PCC Warden Randy Pfister, said that those men worked with road crews to move debris from the storm.

"They were basically supplying the human factor as far as getting it out to the roadways so it could be loaded up by the big endloaders and put it in to the trucks," Troyer explained.

The inmates were called in for a meeting and told they were going to be sent to do this work, and all assembled with complete security screening for outside work qualifications. None of the inmates from PCC had any ties to the Gifford area, and if they had, they wouldn't have been chosen to go for security purposes.

"They were very agreeable to it. They wanted to go and help. They knew what they were going for and they had no objections," Troyer said.

Troyer spent some time in Gifford while the work crews were there and he had a chance to speak with some of the inmates. He said the feedback was very positive.

"They were happy they were able to go back and serve and give back to the community," he said.

The crew has been back for the majority of the week and Troyer said they have been told they won't be going back out to assist until further notice.

Back at PCC, the staff got together to help two fellow employees after their homes sustained major damage from the tornado in Washington. They determined that they would collect cash donations and give to the two individuals because, "in a catastrophic event like this, people need cash in hand to be able to purchase the things they need," Troyer explained.

In three days, the staff collected more than \$1,600 and was able to split it down the middle for the two staff members. Pfister told Troyer when he presented them with the money, the two were very humbled with the donations, especially in such a short period of time. He also said they would continue collecting for a few more days and turn it around for the two officers.

"They are in the process in trying to make arrangements on how to get going with their lives again. Some of their things were still there and some weren't. They've been displaced from their homes and they're just trying to cope with what happened," Troyer said.